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Magazine

Intelligent Video Helping To Prevent Copper Theft

May 16, 2008

Arteco recently announced the installation of IVS systems in The Columbus Division of Electricity utility substations, in Columbus, Ohio, for the purpose of preventing copper theft and other security related issues.

With the demand for copper overseas, especially China, driving up the price for scrap, increasing numbers of criminals are engaging in metal theft. Among the hardest hit victims of copper theft are electrical utility substations because of the large amounts of copper wire they use for electrical grounding and transmission, and because these facilities are often located remotely where theft is hard to monitor.

Recognizing its metal is an asset to protect, The Columbus Division of Electricity has recently turned to Arteco to proactively combat this problem. The Columbus Division of Electricity, part of the Division of Power and Water for the City of Columbus, Ohio, provides more than 1 million residents and contracting communities with water treatment and electric power distribution through various water plants and utility substations.

Arteco's Intelligent Video surveillance offers The Columbus Division of Electricity a practical, efficient resolution. After setting up a "virtual" perimeter around the fence of the substations and areas within the substation around the transformer, video analytics technology provides true object orientation and recognition and real-time alerts that can prevent the theft.

Should a dog wander into this perimeter or trash be blown in it, the system holds steady. If a man approaches the gate of the substation the system detects the size and orientation immediately, and triggers an event within the IVS. At the utility control center, an alert sounds and a red box appears on a video monitor that draws attention to the violated area. Personnel double-click on the red box to instantly review video of the man entering the gate while simultaneously watching the perpetrator real-time in a second window. Security uses this information to take the appropriate countermeasure.

"Intelligent Video provides a pro-active and cost-effective solution to a problem that is growing at alarming proportions," said Steve Birkmeier, Arteco's vice president. "An Arteco IVS system can monitor an area and send real-time video verified alerts to personnel for further response. This results in a quicker apprehension of a suspect, or even prevention of the theft attempt."

The effect of copper theft on utility companies is both costly and dangerous due to loss of materials, damage to transformers, electrocution and possible loss of power to customers. Damaged transformers and substations can cost thousands of dollars to repair or replace. It is also not uncommon for thieves to knock out power to thousands of customers in the process of stealing a few hundred dollars of scrap copper. More frequently, thieves are electrocuting themselves in the process and creating a hazardous environment for workers sent in to fix the problem after the fact.

Currently, solutions involve "tag and hold" statutes, which force scrap yards to record personal information and hold all purchases for a period of time, and microscopic tags placed on the metal wires by the companies. However, both of these solutions are ineffective until after the theft has occurred and the damage has been done.

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